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ABSTRACT

This booklet is both a description of activities to organize a General Educational Development program (GED) alumni association and a guide to starting an alumni group. It specifically focuses on "Operation Alumni," a project to establish a local GED alumni organization at Reading Area Community College that could serve as a state model for other GED programs. These steps in organizing the alumni association are described: getting started, contacting potential members, the first meeting, brainstorming regarding possible reasons for success and failure and analyzing the brainstorming, the big mailing, keeping records, and developing a structure to meet alumni needs. These roles assumed by the GED alumni organization are then discussed: supporting graduates as they pursue further education or seek a new job, assisting future GED students, planning social activities drawing new members, raising and organizing money, and publicizing through production of a newsletter. Following a summary of the project, descriptions are provided of three other 310 projects in Pennsylvania that also dealt with alumni associations. A final section provides annotations of available resources on developing an adult basic education/GED alumni association and a list of contacts for existing GED alumni associations. (YLB)

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OPERATION ALUMNI:



Finding Them,
Organizing Them,
Making the PAACE Connection

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1 Getting Started

Over the past few years, there has been a lot of talk about GED alumni associations. Apparently, a handful of programs scattered around Pennsylvania had organized alumni groups, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education wholeheartedly endorsed the concept. We (Melissa Jamula and Tana Reiff) were curious about the possibilities for an alumni organization at Reading Area Community College (RACC).

After all, RACC produces a big list of GED graduates—about 500 every year—from seven program sites throughout Berks County. Certainly, there was great potential here for a strong alumni group.

In 1985 the impetus arrived. PDE's interest in fostering alumni associations became a priority for "310" projects (those "special projects" funded as a mandate of the federal Adult Basic Education Act). We responded with a proposal, called "Operation Alumni: Finding Them, Organizing Them, Making the PAACE Connection," which was funded. This book is a product of our activities during the 1985-86 school year, as well as a guide for others starting an alumni group. (Three other alumni projects received grants, as well; read about them in Chapter 15, pp. 21-24.)

AIMING STRAIGHT

Operation Alumni had two main goals:

- (1) To organize an active local GED alumni organization that will serve as a state model for other GED programs.
- (2) To develop strategies for making linkage with PAACE attractive to GED alumni.

But when the time came to actually form the group, it was important to establish even clearer purposes. When approaching potential members, the organizers wanted to speak concretely and enthusiastically about the group's purposes.

In September, Melissa Jamula, Pat Kotch (a counselor in the GED program), and one GED graduate discussed the basic concept of an alumni organization and debated the best possible services it could

provide. They decided not to map out every detail; that should be the prerogative of the alumni themselves. Rather, they decided only that the RACC GED Alumni Organization should serve as:

- (1) A social and support unit for students who have obtained the GED diploma.
- (2) A support unit for current GED students.
- (3) A support unit for statewide adult education funding efforts.

SUPPORT IS THE KEY

It was obvious that the key word among these missions was support. Yes, an Alumni Organization could go a long way in promoting GED programs, but to be truly successful, it would have to meet the alumni's needs first.

The three at this preliminary meeting agreed that the missions they had outlined would provide a framework yet allow members to mold the group to their needs.



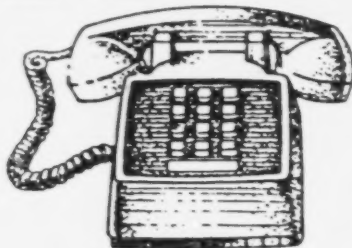
Last year's GED grads were potential members of this year's Alumni Organization.

In addition, Melissa informally surveyed high schools, colleges, and sororities with existing alumni groups. Each reported having a large mailing list, but a small active membership. "Be realistic in the amount of time and energy your alumni will be able to commit," they advised her. Perhaps, they said, it would be wise to explore nontraditional ways of organizing the association. It proved to be good advice.

2 Contacting Potential Members

They weren't advertising an old, standard product like baking soda. Melissa Jamula and her embryonic team didn't even yet have a product to sell. The first step, then, would have to be market research. Was there enough interest among RACC's GED graduates to continue with plans to form an alumni association?

To find out, the organizers could have tried a mass mailing. Instead, they decided that personal contact by telephone would be the best method. When you receive a form letter in the mail, you know you are probably just one tiny drop in a very large bucket. But when someone calls you on the phone, you know they went to some trouble to hear your opinion.



Melissa and two counselors randomly selected the names of 100 GED graduates from the list of 1,000 who had graduated over the past two years. They then called all 100 persons to survey their interest. This was a lot of work, to be sure, but they hoped the personal contact would pay off in the long run through higher alumni interest and better meeting attendance.

THE \$64,000 QUESTIONS

The callers asked three questions:

1. "If we were to form a GED Alumni Organization, would you be interested in becoming a member? There would be no time obligations, and you would receive our newsletter."
2. "If we held meetings or activities of interest to you, would you be available to attend in the daytime? In the evening? Or would you be unable to attend at this time?"

3. "We'll be holding an organizational meeting on Tuesday, October _____. At that time, we'd like to talk with some of our alumni to get a better idea of what types of topics and activities are of interest to you. Can we count on you to attend this meeting?"

Finally, they thanked each person for their time and told them they could expect to hear from the alumni organization soon, even if they didn't plan to attend the meeting.

AND THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE

Of the 100 graduates called, a whopping 82 expressed interest in the organization. Only 18 said they were not.

Of those who expressed interest, 23 said they preferred daytime meetings, 47 preferred evening meetings, and 12 were unable to attend the first meeting.

When it came to pinning them down to a specific date, 22 of the 82 who had expressed interest said they would attend. The remaining 60 said they would not.

The response to the telephone effort was gratifying. If 22 people actually showed up for the first meeting, the organization would be off to a running start.

IN HINDSIGHT

"If we could make the calls again," says Melissa Jamula, "we would like to speak in more detail to solicit people's reactions." (Of course, that would take even more time.) "Nevertheless," she adds, "our ideas were met with relative enthusiasm, and that counted for a lot at this stage in the game."

Another idea would be to follow up the phoning with a letter or post card reminding everyone, including those who said they weren't interested, of the upcoming meeting date. Or, if you're really ambitious, you could make reminder calls a day or two before the meeting.

3 The First Meeting

In the initial phone calls to 100 alumni, 22 people had said they were interested enough in a GED alumni organization to come to a planning meeting. An evening time was preferred, and a week later that evening arrived.

And so did the rain. All day. All evening. One of the heaviest rains Reading had seen in a long time. What luck.

Only four hardy alumni showed up for the meeting that rainy October night. Of course, Melissa and the counselor, Pat Kotch, also braved the wet weather, but a grand total turnout of six was clearly disappointing. All that work and it rains. Wouldn't you know it? The best-laid plans, as they say. . .

Maybe follow-up calls would have helped. Maybe not. Anyway, those in attendance discussed the new organization

in generalities, but from this response--rain or no rain--the conclusion was obvious: It was time to go back to the drawing board.



Only a few were interested enough to attend the first meeting on a rainy night.

4 Back to the Drawing Board

Giving up would have been easy. But if there was to be an alumni organization, there would first have to be more thinking.

In November, three staff members and ten alumni held a brainstorming session. Melissa explained that to ensure the success of an alumni organization they should first address the issues that might cause it to fail, the reasons it might succeed, and what steps to take next. In the "rules" of brainstorming, everyone was free to offer ideas, without comment or criticism from the others.

REASONS FOR FAILURE

Aside from bad weather, why might an alumni organization fail? The brainstorming session produced this list:

- People are too busy to become involved.
- Schedules won't permit participation.
- Interests are so varied that meetings

will have limited appeal.

- We don't know most of the people. We'd feel uncomfortable attending big gatherings.
- If alumni just took the GED exam without having attended class, they'd have very little sense of allegiance.
- Alumni don't fully understand the benefits of such an organization.

REASONS FOR SUCCESS

The organization could succeed, said the group, if it could serve to fulfill the following purposes:

- Continue friendships made in class.
- Provide a place to turn for assistance in job hunting and college applications.
- Show appreciation for the opportunities the GED gave to members.
- Be fun.
- Support adult education in its funding efforts.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Finally, Melissa asked, "What do we do at this point?" The group's suggestions were to:

- Rethink the practicality of an alumni organization.
- Hold two monthly meetings, one during the day, one in the evening.
- Hold meetings alternately, daytime and evening.
- Hold small sessions on topics of interest rather than large general meetings.
- Form "Interest Committees" which would meet separately and from which alumni could choose.

REVELATIONS

Everyone came away from the brainstorming session with a positive feeling. They had determined that the concept of the organization was valid, but what was needed was an approach that would meet the interests and schedules of the busy alumni.

Perhaps the rain that October night had been a blessing in disguise. It had forced the core group to take a closer look at the idea, to focus on real needs. How else will alumni be lured to meetings, regardless of the weather?

ANALYZING THE BRAINSTORMING

The next imminent step was to analyze closely what really had transpired in the brainstorming session. Melissa and three teachers met a few days later to consider the ideas that had surfaced. After much discussion, they listed ten conclusions:

- The idea of an alumni organization is worthwhile.
- It is impractical to try to meet all needs and all schedules by holding one large monthly meeting.
- It seemed a good idea to develop smaller Interest Committees.
- Personalized invitations to join a Committee should be mailed out.
- Committees should serve as support units for both alumni and current GED students.
- The possibility of future large-group

presentations should not be precluded, but the organization should be thought of more as a network of support units.

- Group unity should be maintained through a newsletter.
- Membership cards would give the organization a sense of formality and importance.
- There should be no dues to pay except for voluntary PAACE membership fees. Mailing and other costs would be covered by fund-raising activities.

These conclusions seemed to zero in on the realities of forming an alumni organization. The Interest Committees/support network approach broke from the traditional concept of an alumni organization as a "club" holding monthly meetings. However, having thoroughly considered the needs and situations of a diverse alumni population, the conclusions felt solid, as though the concept of the organization had at last jelled. The promise of success was exciting.

THE INTEREST COMMITTEES

The final step in analyzing the situation was to come up with a list of Interest Committees. Still in November, Melissa, Pat (the counselor), and four alumni, drawing on all they had learned so far, decided that the general missions of the organization would best be met through seven specialized subgroups, called Interest Committees:

- Continuing Education
- Job-seeking Skills
- Statewide Funding
- Support of Current GED Students
- Alumni Activities
- Membership
- Fundraising

It was another productive meeting. Everyone felt "ready to roll."

5 The Big Mailing

The next step was to mail a letter to the 1000 people who had received GED diplomas through RACC over the past two years. (Anyone who had graduated more than two years ago was welcome to join the Alumni Organization, but it seemed that the more recent graduates were likely to have the most interest. Besides, the postage budget was limited. Perhaps a future news story in the local paper would entice those less recent grads.)

Melissa composed the letter. It focused on explaining the purposes of the new organization. There was no plea to join an Interest Committee or to make any other obligation. The letter merely asked alumni to express their areas of interest--which happened to be the subjects of the seven Interest Committees--on a clip-off section

at the bottom of the letter. Also, graduates were told that they would soon be receiving the Alumni Organization's newsletter. "We fully realized that some people would be 'silent members,'" Melissa acknowledged, "so we didn't want to scare anyone away by asking for big obligations."

Later, after tallying graduates' areas of interest, everyone who responded was telephoned to pursue their interests.

The letter was mailed in early January. Within about a month, more than 100 graduates had responded by returning the clip-off portion of the letter to RACC. This response seemed somewhat disappointing. However, when you consider that direct mail advertisers regard a 2% response as strong, then 10% is fantastic.

This letter was sent to GED graduates of the past two years.

January 7, 1986

Dear GED Graduate,

Congratulations, once again, on having earned your high school equivalency diploma! I hope it has opened many doors for you.

Our adult education staff at Reading Area Community College wants you to know that we haven't forgotten you! We also want to assure you that we fully realize that obtaining your GED diploma was not necessarily the final answer to all of your needs. Therefore, to continue to be of service to you, we are forming a GED Alumni Organization. (Many of you have requested we do this!)

We hope this alumni group will serve several functions:

- The Alumni organization will be a means of aiding you in job-seeking skills.
- The Alumni organization will support you in seeking information on how to continue your education.
- The Alumni organization will keep you abreast of what's happening in adult education on a state-wide basis.
- The Alumni organization will act as a support group for current GED students.
- The Alumni organization will help you keep in touch with your fellow GED classmates.
- and, if we all "pitch in," the GED Alumni organization will be lots of fun!

I hope you'll all see the value of being a member of the GED Alumni Organization. If you'd like to join our group and receive our newsletter, please complete and mail the section below. I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Melissa Jamula
Melissa Jamula
Coordinator, Adult Basic Education

Return to: GED Alumni Assoc.
Attn: Melissa Jamula
RACC
PO Box 1706
Reading, PA 19603

Please detach and return

Yes, I'd like to be a GED Alumni Member! Please send me your newsletter.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

I'm especially interested in:

- ☐ Job Seeking News
- ☐ Continuing Education
- ☐ Planning activities for the group
- ☐ Helping with fundraising
- ☐ Knowing about state-wide adult education efforts
- ☐ Supporting current GED students
- ☐ Helping our membership GROW

If there is any news about you that you'd like included in our first newsletter, please tell us here: _____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

6 Keeping Records

As any group's membership rolls grow, the need to keep manageable records becomes obvious. So it was in Reading.

Immediately upon receiving the first large group of returns from the mass mailing, Melissa and the Adult Education secretary compiled an alphabetical list of names, addresses, phone numbers, and areas of interest. (Later, the Membership Committee can assume this task, in addition to soliciting new members; see page 14.)

A membership list can be filed in several ways. The RACC GED Alumni Organization used a memory typewriter, which made it easy to insert new members. If you have access to a personal computer with a filing or data-base program, you could add

names at any time and the computer will sort them out, not only alphabetically each time, but also by interest, zip code, or any other field (computer talk for category) you might establish.

If you have no electronic assistance, you have two basic choices. Keep a card or Rolodex file to avoid retyping an alphabetical list. Or just keep a list on paper, write in new names as they come in, and periodically retype the list when the scribbling gets out of hand.

Of course, you could always combine the two manual methods by maintaining a card file and periodically typing a list from those cards. Nevertheless, your best bet is a computer.

The beginning of the Alumni Organization membership file looked like this. Be sure to also include zip codes.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Phone</u>	<u>Job Seek News</u>	<u>Con. Ed.</u>	<u>Plan. Act.</u>	<u>Help Fund.</u>	<u>State-wide Adult Ed.</u>	<u>Support current GED students</u>	<u>Helping our membership grow</u>
Acevedo, Maritza	666 Walnut St. Pottstown, PA	327-2560	x						
Adam, Dennis	Box 211 Port Clinton, PA	562-8943	x	x			x		
Barfield, Judy	Box 23 Earlville, PA	367-9023	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Bowers, Troy	1116 Franklin St. Reading, PA	378-5042		x					
Caicedo, Victor	244 N. 11th St. Reading, PA	374-4790		x					
Cassel, Diana	Box 73, RD 2 Birdsboro, PA	582-4792	x	x	x				x
Colona, Mary C.	2811 H Wyoming Dr. Sinking Sp.	678-8196			x		x	x	x
Cruz, Edel	552 Walnut St. Pottstown, PA	326-2859	x	x					
Deaver, Maryanne	1541 Mineral Spr. Rd., Reading, PA	374-8778	x	x			x		
DeWald, Marie	218 Linden St. Reading, PA	373-7805		x				x	
DiMaria, Gina	440 Friedensburg Rd., Reading, PA	779-6752	x	x			x		
Eby, Vicki	2814 Wilson Sch. Ln. S. Spring, PA	670-0336		x	x	x		x	
Eichert, Charles	RD 3, Box 3287 Fleetwood, PA	944-0103	x						
Engle, Jeffrey	281 W. State St. Hamburg, PA	562-3221	x	x					

7 A Structure to Meet Alumni Needs

For any organization to be successful, it must meet the needs of its members. Meeting those needs not only justifies the existence of the organization itself but functions as the lifeblood that keeps the organization viable.

Members may feel a need for some sort of self-fulfillment, a need to serve others with whom they have empathy, or both. In the case of a GED alumni organization, both self and service needs must be addressed.

The RACC GED Alumni Organization

went to great pains to identify its needs. The seven Interest Committees they formed, of which this group became comprised, demonstrates an attempt to fulfill members' needs, thus establishing a solid foundation for future viability.

Though the needs were stated in simpler terms to the group's membership, an analysis shows five essential priorities addressed by the seven committees. As you will readily see, the priorities could be applied to many types of organizations, while the specific committees could vary. This chart illustrates the concepts at work:

<u>ORGANIZATIONAL NEED</u>	<u>COMMITTEE(S)</u>
To guide members in future endeavors:	{ CONTINUING EDUCATION JOB SKILLS
To reciprocate the services received by providing support for subsequent GED students:	{ SUPPORT OF STATEWIDE ADULT EDUCATION EFFORTS SUPPORT OF CURRENT GED STUDENTS
To furnish a social outlet for people with a common bond, that is a GED certificate:	ALUMNI ACTIVITIES
To ensure group continuity:	MEMBERSHIP
To provide financial support for the activities of the organization:	FUNDRAISING

One more possible committee would be a Publicity Committee. The alternative to a separate Publicity Committee could be to establish guidelines for the entire group, then handle publicity via the above committees or by one selected individual.

In answering the mass mailing, prospective members of RACC's GED Alumni Organization selected an area of interest, i.e. one of the committees described above. Each committee then scheduled a first meeting. Some committees coagulated sooner than others. Some committees, as you will read in the next few pages, swung into

real action and produced tangible results sooner than others. But by the end of the year, several things had become clear:

1. The committee/network idea was a wise decision. The Organization could function more smoothly with a clearly delineated division of efforts.
2. Though the needs assessment and organizational formation process had been extensive and time-consuming, members and advisors felt that a solid foundation has been established which would serve well for the future.

8 Support for Taking the Next Step

A major role of a GED alumni organization is to support graduates as they either pursue further education or seek a new job that reflects their newly acquired marketability as a high-school graduate. At RACC, one Interest Committee, the Continuing Education Committee, assumed the first task and another, the Job Skills Committee, worked on the second.

HELP FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

The purpose of the Continuing Education Committee is to serve as an outreach and resource center for alumni and current GED students who are interested in going to college or vocational school. Over 50 alumni indicated interest in continuing education through the initial mailing. Eight of these wanted to serve as peer counselors and the core of the Continuing Education Committee. Melissa arranged for a counselor from the RACC Admissions Office to present them with an "in-service." During this session, they learned how to provide preliminary continuing-education information to other alumni and students.

Though the admissions counselor emphasized the offerings of RACC itself, she made a point of including other colleges that offer similar services. She also



Members of the Continuing Education Committee were briefed by an admissions counselor from RACC's Admissions Office.

strongly stressed the fact that, considering the wide range of services colleges are now offering, virtually anyone can go to

college in one form or another. Included in the packets she distributed and explained was information on:

- RACC's Developmental Studies Program, which provides academic and personal support for community-college students
- Career Testing and Job Placement
- Early Learning Center for Children
- Student Development Center, including a variety of special services for women
- Television courses
- Application for admission
- College catalog
- Financial aid application

Several of these areas of interest could be used individually as workshop topics.

During the spring months, members of the Continuing Education Committee visited GED students at their class sites and established themselves as peer counselors for continuing-education information. They also contacted other alumni who had since expressed interest in seeking further education.

(Incidentally, two alumni applied to RACC during the Continuing Education Committee's first week in existence.)

HOLDING A GED COLLEGE RECEPTION

Immediately after the meeting with the admissions counselor, the Continuing Education Committee made joint plans with the Admissions Office to hold a reception. The gathering was aimed at orienting graduates and students in some of the many higher-education options available to them. The Continuing Education Committee then joined forces with the Alumni Activities Committee to plan the event, and RACC paid for refreshments.

The GED College Reception, held at the RACC campus, sparked newspaper coverage (see article on page 20) and drew 60 persons on a balmy Tuesday night in April. After the admissions counselor spoke to

this large group, the evening culminated in a tour of RACC--along with some greatly enjoyed socializing. Old acquaintances were renewed with former classmates, while alumni already in college gave "pep talks" to their friends.

Without exception, the response from those in attendance was very positive, demonstrating that a dual-purpose event--valuable information plus socializing--is a smart way to work.



The GED College Reception drew 60 people eager to learn about continuing-education opportunities.

The Continuing Education Committee will have to meet periodically, not necessarily on a regular basis, to exchange information. There is too much to know about continuing education to rely on everyone's remembering what transpired at one in-service meeting. By talking among themselves, the alumni can discuss questions they have encountered and learn what would be the best advice to offer. Also, the Committee must organize their efforts at reaching interested graduates with the information they have gathered.

LEARNING TO FIND A GOOD JOB

Certainly, many adults who return to school to study for a high-school diploma are motivated by the desire for better, higher-paying employment. When they pass the GED test, however, they are often at loose ends when it comes to actually taking the right steps toward that job.

Throughout the spring, the Job Skills Committee planned, publicized, and sponsored four workshops for interested alumni

and prospective GED graduates:

- Career Assessment
- Résumé Writing
- Completing Application Forms Correctly
- Effective Interviewing Techniques

Anyone who attends all four workshops would theoretically be fully prepared to attack the job market, including having a printed résumé in hand.

For the first round of workshops, teachers in the GED program volunteered to conduct the workshops. Members of the Job Skills Committee attended. In addition, they studied materials on each subject in hopes of becoming skilled enough to take over the instruction in the future.

Another way to find good instructors is to seek out volunteers from the community such as professional career counselors and personnel officers from area industries. Often, these people are experienced in conducting such workshops and are glad to help, either because they enjoy the publicity generated from newspaper notices for the workshops or because they are participating in their company's community service program.

No matter who the instructors are, they should be well-qualified in the topic and be able to communicate to a group clearly.

Without job-search training, many new graduates simply don't realize their position in the job market. With training, job-seekers are in a much stronger competitive position because they know what to "sell" about themselves and how to do it most effectively. "I never realized I was so saleable," said one alumni after a workshop. "I'm finding out I have more experience and skills than I ever thought." This awareness is beneficial for not only the GED graduate but for the GED program as well: offering job-search assistance at no charge to the program or to students strengthens the immediate value of the GED.

The Job Skills Committee is also securing pamphlets and other printed information for alumni who are unable to attend workshops.

9 Support for Future GED Students

An important role of a GED alumni group can be to assist subsequent students. One way is to directly work with or for the benefit of students currently enrolled in the program from which the alumni emerged. A second way is to work for public (or private) funding of ABE/GED programs. Both avenues suit well the need for alumni to provide appropriate service.

MAKING THE PAACE CONNECTION

A major goal of Operation Alumni was to establish a linkage with the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education (PAACE), the professional organization supporting a variety of adult-education efforts throughout the state. In connection with the mission of working for public funding of ABE/GED programs, it was natural, therefore, for the Support of Statewide Adult Education Efforts Committee to contact and join efforts with PAACE.

On behalf of the Committee, Melissa contacted Joan Leopold, Executive Secretary (and former President) of PAACE (P.O. Box 3796, Harrisburg, PA 17105-3796), for information on both the organization and its current legislative initiatives. Though Melissa had hoped a representative of PAACE could visit RACC and offer more insight than she was able to, Leopold did send membership literature, along with information on three bills currently before the state legislature.

One of the bills, House Bill 2038, had passed the state House of Representatives and was currently in the Education Committee in the State Senate. PAACE was in the process of urging a massive letter-writing campaign to state senators, especially to members of the Education Committee.

JOINING THE PUSH

The initial five members of the Support for Statewide Adult Education Efforts Committee were appalled to learn of the lack of state funding for ABE/GED up to

this time. They responded to PAACE's initiative by calling fellow alumni to urge them to (1) register to vote, if they weren't already registered, and (2) write letters to key senators on the Education Committee. Of course, they also wrote letters themselves (see opposite)--100 in all, and Senator Michael O'Pake wrote back.

In addition, several alumni, who were enrolled in credit classes at RACC, spread the word among their fellow college students, who also, somewhat surprisingly, wrote letters to state senators.

The Committee also took advantage of the state League of Women's Voters' toll-free phone number, which supplies information on the current status of bills in the state legislature. That number is 1-800-692-7281.

JOINING PAACE

PAACE has designated a special interest group for GED Alumni for several years; however, only a few Pennsylvania GED alumni have joined PAACE, and the SIG has remained relatively inactive. Members of the Support for Statewide Adult Education Efforts Committee plan to join the GED Alumni SIG, attend its meetings, and participate in its activities.

Meantime, Operation Alumni provided the RACC GED Alumni Organization with \$25 for an organizational membership in PAACE. In the future, the Organization treasury will provide the dues money. Also, individual alumni can join as GED Alumni members for \$5 each (regular Individual membership is \$15), pending possible changes in the GED Alumni category. At that time, Committee members will conduct an all-out PAACE membership campaign.

An ongoing activity of the Support for Statewide Adult Education Efforts Committee is to keep abreast of statewide funding legislation. The initial activity, writing letters to legislators, was certainly a success--though HB 2038 was still in limbo at the end of the project year.

Michael A. O'Pake
645 Penn Street, Rm. 201
Reading, PA 19601

Dear Senator O'Pake,

I write this letter to you with deep concern for all the people in the Commonwealth who do not have a basic education. What does destiny hold for the uneducated and illiterate? Statistics show 2,700,000 adults in Pennsylvania do not have a high school diploma and 750,000 adults are functionally illiterate in the Commonwealth. In my opinion the above statistics prove the future bleak.

In 1974 my life reached a standstill. High school held no rewards for myself. I then parted from Daniel Boone High School taking with me a 9th grade education. In June of 1976 my class graduated. By July of the same year I decided I was ready for college. By fortune I met Pieter Miller, at that time, a GED teacher, now Director of Adult Education at R.A.C.C. Pieter Miller arranged for me to take the S.A.T. exams. Amazingly as it may sound, my scores were acceptable to enter Reading Area Community College.

In September of 1976 I entered college along with my high school classmates. Without the encouragement and guidance of Pieter, I may never have received the opportunity to enter college. Knowing I was on my way to college, I worked to receive my GED diploma. I feel fortunate that I was given the chance to prove to myself that I was intelligent.

Please, Senator O'Pake, hear my plea for help. Support the bill 2038. Bill 2038 possibly can decrease unemployment, welfare, and crime in the Commonwealth. Knowing these issues are your concern as well as mine. With your help, Senator, we may win this round!

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Janice Kille-Harmon
Janice Kille-Harmon

This is a copy of an actual letter
written by an alumna and sent to
her state senator.

SUPPORTING CURRENT GED STUDENTS

The other outreach support role of a GED alumni group is to help current GED students. To fulfill that purpose, the RACC GED Alumni Organization formed the Support of Current GED Students Committee.

The Committee got off the ground by discussing at length their own experiences as GED students. The consensus was that all were apprehensive about the decision to return to school, that attending class to prepare for the GED exam was difficult, and that actually taking the test was frightening. The discussion was light and full of personal anecdotes and laughter, and the six in attendance were unanimous in feeling that it helps to hear someone else say, "I did it; you can, too!"

This interaction illustrates one advantage of the Interest Committee concept: alumni feel comfortable talking about their fears and offering ideas for helping others with the same fears. Such dialogue would be unlikely in a large group.

WAYS OF HELPING

Committee members decided to visit

classes of current GED students to observe how, if at all, the class atmosphere had changed since they attended, listen to students' concerns, and offer on-the-spot encouragement.

They also planned to have a Committee member present at every Registration/Orientation session for new students, to answer questions and offer "pep talks."

The third plan of action was to participate in a Volunteer Tutor Bank, to work one-to-one with students preparing to take the GED exam.

It was learned that an alumni group in the Pen Argyl/Bangor area had successfully lobbied to have future GED students receive school district diplomas in addition to standard GED certificates.

Another potential activity is to help stage a graduation event. The GED Alumni Association of the Lancaster Adult Enrichment Center has assisted with planning the Center's annual graduation banquet for about 15 years. Not only does the Alumni Association work behind the scenes before the banquet, but they also function as masters or mistresses of ceremony for the awards presentations.

10 Planning Social Activities

Activities related to each committee remain the responsibility of that committee; for example, job-search workshops remain within the scope of the Job Skills Committee. However, large-group or purely social activities would be planned, at least in part, by the Alumni Activities Committee. Thus, the social goal is fulfilled.

The Committee's first meeting produced five alumni and lots of ideas. Two activities comprised the immediate agenda.

The first, planned jointly with the Continuing Education Committee, was a GED College Reception for graduates interested in pursuing higher education. Besides that purpose, such an event also validates the merit of the GED and introduces grads to the Alumni Organization.

The second activity would be a bus trip to New York City--an appropriate choice since: (1) it is a reasonable distance away, (2) renovations to the Statue of Liberty will have been recently completed, and (3) many ESL people are particularly interested in the Statue of Liberty. Plans for a fall trip, including selecting a date, booking a bus, publicizing the trip, and researching New York attractions, began in the spring.

This committee must take its responsibilities seriously because so many other people are involved. Too many details can run afoul without careful advance planning. The possibilities for alumni activities are limitless as long as they appeal to members, but planning procedures remain a constant and demand a lot of attention.

11 Drawing New Members

The Membership Committee is in charge of bringing a constant flow of new members into the Organization. At their first meeting, they initiated four plans.

First, they began sending every new GED graduate a letter inviting them to join the Organization. The committee produces, addresses, and mails these letters, approximately 50 per month.

However, the committee, all new members themselves, was convinced of the value of personal contact. Therefore, they will meet once a month to divide up the job of phoning each new graduate to make a personal invitation. This strategy is wise in itself, but it's also smart to reinforce the form letter with a backup invitation.

The Membership Committee also made long-term plans to undertake the mammoth project of individually telephoning GED graduates from years past--thousands of them. Though less recent graduates may

not feel as compelled to join a GED Alumni Organization, they do represent a vast pool of potential members.

Finally, the Membership Committee will produce and issue membership cards. Some organizations give a card to every potential member as a way of encouraging them to become active. These names are then added to the mailing list. Other groups issue cards only to active members.



Recent GED graduates were immediately invited to join the Alumni Organization.

12 Raising and Organizing Money

Fact of life: virtually every organization needs money for one purpose or another. An alumni organization may need money to:

- Pay for organizational supplies, such as paper, letterheads, bank or check charges, and other incidentals.
- Produce a newsletter.
- Mail membership information and/or the newsletter.
- Offer group activities at reduced rates.
- Grant a small scholarship for further education to a GED graduate.
- Rent a meeting hall for larger events.
- Help to pay for a graduation event.
- Donate books or materials or present a special gift to the GED program.

One way to raise money is through membership dues. However, most alumni groups veer away from this method because they do not want to discourage potential members who cannot afford the dues. Even so, membership dues are unlikely to raise nearly enough money to meet the organization's needs.

Most alumni groups opt instead to hold fundraising events. RACC's GED Alumni Organization chose this route.

PLANNING A FUNDRAISER

The Fundraising Committee of the RACC GED Alumni Organization decided to begin with a cake sale, a practically failsafe method with which several of the members had previous experience.

As is true with any fundraiser, the first order of business is to set a time and place. The next item is to break down the entire event into small tasks, then to assign workers to do each job. In this case, the tasks were to:

1. Call alumni to ask for donations of baked goods.
2. Contact a local merchant to seek permission to sell baked goods in the lobby of his store.
3. Solicit members to tend the stand and assign specific times to each.

4. Formulate policies for running the stand and collecting money.
5. Publicize the event through the local newspaper, posters in the store where the bake sale will be held, in the alumni newsletter, and, if possible, on a local TV or radio station's public service announcements.

Assigning a general chairperson to coordinate all these tasks is usually a good idea, though in a small group a cooperative effort among everyone involved may work out fine. When there is a Fundraising Committee already in place, a leader may emerge who naturally becomes the general chairperson of the fundraising event.

A few words of advice on fundraising: First, involve as many members as possible. Not only does this divide the labor more fairly, but it strengthens the organization. Second, plan fundraisers carefully so that as few as possible are necessary—one or, at most, two a year. Not only the members, but the public, as well, tire of too many fundraisers.

ONCE YOU HAVE SOME MONEY

Money, as we all know, is a delicate thing. Mishandling of it can cause rifts within a group or downright loss of funds. Therefore, it is critical to properly organize finances right from the start.

The first step is to set up a bank account. The RACC GED alumni learned the importance of shopping around among banks to see which offers the best deal for nonprofit organizations. One bank, for instance, treats all organizations as businesses, thus imposing a multitude of service charges on checking accounts: a monthly maintenance fee of \$7.50 if an account falls below the bank's "earning credit rate" or average daily balance, 12¢ for each check deposited, 10¢ for each check processed, and 2¢ per item sorted through the account. Another bank allows organizations to open regular "personal" checking accounts with no service charge on a \$400 average monthly balance, or \$4

per month under that average.

If the organization can maintain the bank's specified minimum balance, it may prefer a NOW checking account, which draws 5½% interest. Or, if the organization expects to write very few checks, it may open a statement savings account instead of a checking account, to draw higher interest. When money is needed--for an annual event, for instance--someone must go to the bank to withdraw either cash or a cashier's check.

TIPS FOR STARTING AN ACCOUNT

A nonprofit organization does not need to be incorporated to open a bank account. However, regardless of the type of account chosen, the organization should have a taxpayer identification number, officially known as an Employer Identification Number (EIN), from the Internal Revenue Service (read more about this below). Using an EIN avoids having any interest income reported to the Social Security number of one of the members.

Another matter to keep in mind is that of signatures. Any number of members may be authorized to sign checks, as long as the bank has a record of those signatures. However, it's usually a good idea to require two signatures so that no one can spend money without someone else's knowing about it. This avoids misuse of funds and, heaven forbid, the possibility of anyone absconding with the cash.

Finally, establish with the bank exactly where to have statements mailed. In case the treasurer or other financial officer changes and fails to register a change of address, bank statements will always reach the proper person. If the organization is an offshoot of an institution such as a community college or school district, it's best to have statements mailed to the institutional address.

MATTERS OF CONCERN TO UNCLE SAM

To apply for an Employer Identification Number, ask for Form SS-4 from your local IRS office (or call 1-800-424-FORMS). While you're waiting for your SS-4 to be processed, keep a photocopy to

show that the number is pending. Your organization will then be required to file Form 990 yearly, which the IRS will send you. If your gross receipts for the year are under \$25,000, all you have to do is check a box, sign the form, and mail it in.

The image shows Form SS-4, titled "Application for Employer Identification Number". It is a multi-part form with sections for "Part I: General Information" and "Part II: Additional Information". The form includes fields for the organization's name, address, and type of organization. It also has checkboxes for various tax-exempt purposes and a section for the preparer's signature and date. The form is labeled "Form SS-4" at the top left and "Part I" at the bottom right.

Ask for Form SS-4 from the IRS.

To apply for official nonprofit status, which exempts you from paying income tax, file Form 1024 (if the organization is not church-affiliated), along with your EIN or a copy of your SS-4. In about a month you will receive a Letter of Determination, telling you whether your application for nonprofit status has been approved or denied. An alumni organization shouldn't have any trouble being approved. The name of the group is then listed in the IRS publication, Cumulative List of Organizations. Another advantage of nonprofit status is that people can then make tax-deductible contributions to your organization.

All this governmental paperwork may sound like a lot of trouble, but it's not much at all. Being properly registered with the IRS and your bank not only clears up a multitude of money-management hassles but clears the way to more successful fundraising. For more information, speak with someone at your local IRS office.

By the way, an alumni organization would probably not qualify for exemption from Pennsylvania state sales tax because the membership is limited. If, on the other hand, you opened up membership to anyone, not just alumni, you might be able to qualify. For details, contact your local office of the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue.

13 Producing a Newsletter

There are many ways to publicize an alumni organization. And there are many resources to tell you how to use the media. But, as Tom (In Search of Excellence) Peters recently noted in his syndicated column, "On Excellence," the best advertising is still word of mouth. Among the least expensive and most effective ways to promote word of mouth, Peters went on, are open houses (see page 10) and newsletters.

An alumni organization can certainly benefit from a newsletter. With minimal time and money, it can keep members informed of upcoming events--and of events they missed (in hopes that next time they won't want to miss out). Further, a newsletter can help promote the goals of the organization by, for example, providing job-search tips or information on financial aid for college.

EDITORIAL ORGANIZATION

To start a newsletter for the RACC GED Alumni Organization, Melissa Jamula took charge of the first issue. (See pages 18 and 19.) She wrote the copy, including gathering responses from alumni to the initial mailing asking what they were doing now. Next, the adult education secretary typed the copy according to the line length Melissa specified. Melissa then pasted up the columns and added big, handwritten headlines. Finally, the newsletter was offset-printed in the college printing department. All very quick and easy.

For the next issue, however, the alumni themselves will take more responsibility. That's when a division of labor and a schedule will help ensure a smooth flow, timely release, and good, readable product.

First, those working on the newsletter must decide what topics should be covered. Someone must be assigned to research and write each brief article. For example, if Sue Smith was in charge of the open house, she might be just the right person to write a report on the open house. Or, each committee could submit a report of its recent activities and plans. One person could be

in charge of compiling upcoming events into a calendar. Another popular idea is to publish alumni's creative writing.

The rest of the procedure would remain the same as how Melissa handled the first issue. Someone, preferably a member of the alumni group, would type the copy. Others should proofread the typed copy. The next person(s) would paste it up into the standard format, perhaps with the help of someone who already knows how to do it. As for duplication, offset or high-quality photocopying is easier to handle and more attractive than ditto or mimeograph.

MAKING PEOPLE WANT TO READ

A newsletter is of no value if people don't read it. To make a newsletter more readable, apply these tips:

1. **Pick a catchy name.** Run a contest for the best name suggestion. Then set up the title in transfer lettering or typesetting to make it grab attention.
2. **Keep the newsletter to a reasonable length.** Although it's nice to be able to publish everyone's contribution, a too-large publication can be intimidating and a smaller one much more inviting. What's more, a four- to six-page newsletter costs less to duplicate and mail.
3. **Keep column widths narrow.** Readability studies show that a two- or three-column format on an 8½"-wide sheet is much more readable than running copy across the full width of the page.
4. **Use illustrations.** Can someone in your group draw? Drawings or well-reproduced photographs not only enhance your stories but break up the pages graphically -- another readability booster.

Finally, duplicate and mail as many copies as you can afford. (Check the Post Office for new rules on bulk mailing.) Then send them to both your alumni mailing list and other key persons. A newsletter, after all, is an excellent publicity tool.

OPERATION: ALUMNI

The Newsletter
of the
GED Alumni
Organization
of the Reading Area
Community College

GED Alumni Group "Sets Sail"

We're off to an exciting start. GED alumni! Thanks to your interest and support, your alumni organization will be an effective avenue for meeting your needs and for helping others!

Based upon what you told us about your interests, we've designed our alumni organization to be a bit different than traditional "clubs." Instead of holding monthly meetings, we've formed a "support network" -- interest committees to which you can turn for information, and committees on which we hope YOU will participate. Some of these committees are already very active -- some are just getting started. The key to success will be YOU. We need YOUR support. Our interest committees are:

- Job Seeking News
- Fundraising
- Alumni Activities
- Support of current GED students
- Support of state-wide Adult Ed. efforts
- Helping our membership GROW
- Continuing Education

If you're willing to serve on a committee, GREAT! We'd love to have you! If you can't be active, but need some information -- just give us a call. For instance, if you want to go on to college, but don't know how to "get started", call and leave a message. One of your alumni friends will call and give you great advice! Suppose you have a friend who wants to go to GED class but is just TERRIFIED. (Remember that feeling?) Some of our alumni will gladly call and offer a WONDERFUL "pep talk."

So, the message is ... this is YOUR organization. USE it -- any way you'd like. Become active, if you can. Or call when you need advice.

For alumni information, call Melissa Jamula at R.A.C.C. at 372-4721, ext. 283. Leave a message, if necessary, and you'll hear from us SOON!

Main topics belong on page 1.

Spread the Word... Tell A Friend...

* * * * *

* For any information about our Alumni Organization, please contact Melissa Jamula at 372-4721, ext. 283. *

* * * * *

The Missions of the GED Alumni Organization

1. To serve as GED alumni
2. To serve as current GED
3. To aid in funding efforts

Simple, handwritten or typeset headlines break up the page and draw readers into each article.

Come One, Come All RACC To Sponsor GED College Reception

The Admissions Office at Reading Area Community College extends a warm invitation to all GED alumni to attend a reception at RACC on Tuesday, April 29th at 6:30 PM. Come enjoy a tour of RACC, hear from a panel of GED alumni who have gone on to college, find out about the MANY financial grants and opportunities available to you. And, of course, enjoy the refreshments. MANY alumni indicated their interest in going on to school -- take advantage of this opportunity to find out how to get started!

If you're planning to attend, please call Melissa at 372-4721, ext. 283, or Anna Hehn, RACC's admission counselor, at ext. 272 so we know how many alumni to expect. It will be a GREAT evening!!

RACC To Offer Assistance To Single Parents

The Reading Area Community College has recently received a grant to offer assistance to Single Parents. If you are unmarried or legally separated from a spouse and have a child for which you have either custody or joint custody, you may be eligible for participation.

The grant offers many kinds of assistance. IT IS NOT ONLY FOR COLLEGE-BOUND ADULTS! While aid with tuition and child care costs is available, so is information on job-seeking and personal growth.

Any interested alumni are invited to call the college. Call 372-4721, and ask for the Single Parent Program in the Developmental Studies Dept.

Continuing Ed. Committee Members Become "Experts"

Are you thinking about college but you haven't ANY idea what to do first? Do you know you should really talk to a college counselor -- but the thought of not even knowing what to ask makes you CRINGE? Well, HAVE HOPE, alumni! You now have a SUPER committee of friends who can tell you ALLLLLLL you need to know about taking those first steps.

Recently, your continuing education committee of Dean Levensgood, Janice Harman, Judy Barfield, Masako Xille, Lascena Preddle, and Kelly McKee attended a workshop given by Anna Hehn, admissions counselor at RACC. (Thanks, again, Anna!) Anna told this group all about the MANY opportunities available to attend college. (And believe me, there are lots!) Now, your Continuing Ed. committee would like to pass this information on to you. Just call 372-4721, ext. 283 and leave a message. Your alumni friends will get back to you with much good information!

Alumni Join In Letter-writing Campaign

GED Alumni are joining forces to help promote the cause of adult education. There are currently three "Bills" before the legislature which seek funds for adult education. Our alumni are writing to local legislators to ask their support of these Bills.

Did you know that Pennsylvania has 2,700,000 adults who do not have high school diplomas (the fourth highest number in the nation)? Did you know that with current funds, only 1% of these adults can participate in adult basic education efforts?

C'mon, alumni! Please join our campaign! If you haven't received a phone call from one of your fellow alumni, please call us for details about how YOU can help. Thanks for your support, alumni!

**Writing in a conversational tone
holds readers' attention.**

Masako Kille, GED Grad, Honored By Pennsylvania Department of Education

Masako (Molly) Kille, a graduate of both our GED and ESL programs, was named as one of ten Adult Basic Education Students of the Year by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Masako was chosen from thousands of adult students who participated in GED programs across Pennsylvania. She was named not only because of her achievement, but also because of her enthusiasm and her dedication to adult education, and her determination in overcoming many personal hardships in coming back to school and earning her diploma. Molly is currently working toward a degree in gerontology. Congratulations and Best Wishes, Masako!!

GED Class Rings And Jewelry Now Available

Did you ever look with envy at that class ring that your best friend sports? Well, GED grad, a class ring can now be yours! For the first time, a number of jewelers are handling GED jewelry. Prices are rather high, but they are competitive with the cost of traditional high school jewelry. If you'd like to know more about the availability of this jewelry, just give us a "ring"!

Fundraisers Forming: Looking For A Few Good Men (And women, of course!)

The initial meeting of the Alumni Fundraisers resulted in lots of good ideas -- and in the reality that we need alumni support to be effective in this effort.

Janice Harman has agreed to be chairman of our fundraising committee, and SHE WANTS YOU! (Uncle Sam will just have to wait!)

Are you willing to serve on the fundraising committee? Or maybe "bake a cake" now and then? If so, please call! It's for a great cause -- Your alumni organization!

GED Exam To Be Revised

If you're a GED alumni, breathe a sigh of relief. If you're a GED student, HIT THOSE BOOKS! The Pennsylvania Department of Education has announced that in 1988 our state will adopt the new GED exam as mandated by the American Council on Education.

Although we haven't been given any "particulars," GED programs are being told to expect a much more difficult test, including higher level math, the technicalities of science and a writing sample! The revision of the GED exam is being made in response to the Governor's report in turning the Tide and Chapter 5 regulations (involving curriculum) that affect grades Kindergarten through 12.

All this is good news, however, GED Grads! It means that your GED diploma will continue to be considered as valid as a traditional high school diploma.

Sooooo ... bring on the exam!!!

GED Graduation To Be Held June 5, 1986

RACC's formal graduation ceremony for GED graduates will be held in the Reading High School auditorium on Thursday, June 5, 1986 at 8 PM. GED grads will receive their diplomas in caps and gowns and be entertained by the Reading High School Acapella Choir and Orchestra. Following the ceremony, grads and their guests will be treated to a reception in the Reading High cafeteria.

GED alumni are cordially invited to attend this ceremony and "cheer on" our new GED graduates. Or if you were unable to attend graduation the year you received your diploma, please feel more than welcome to be a part of the ceremony. (Call Melissa at RACC for details). GED graduation is always a highlight of our program. And it gives our graduates a night to be remembered for years to come. Please join us!

Our V.I.P.'s ... Our Alumni

A number of alums wanted to pass on greetings or share their J.U.T call or drop us a note!

Dean Levensgood and Raymond Peffley are both working hard to at R.A.C.C. We're behind you, guys! Crack those books!

Phyllis Greth is recovering from eye surgery. Get well soon!

Denise Marks has a baby on the way. Happy LABOR DAY, Denise!

GED'ers in the work world ...

Gloria Scholl obtained a job at the Leader Home through having her GED. Congratulations, Gloria!

Rose Turczynski is becoming one of Tupperware's star saleswomen!

Christopher Panetta has overcome lots of personal obstacles to obtain his diploma and land a job with J & L Importers. We knew you could do it, Chris!

Linda Epler got her GED and then put in many hours of training to prepare herself for being a day care provider for special care children. Linda works for the Berks County Intermediate Unit.

Words of Encouragement ...

Diane Cassel writes: "I was away from school 28 years before I received my GED. With confidence from self, family and friends, I succeeded! Others can, too, for it starts within yourself. Try your best to achieve your dream, wishes or wants. You'll be surprised at what you can accomplish."

Sara Salcedo tells us ... "Getting my GED was one of the best things I've ever done. It really boosted my confidence in myself and I think it did for my classmates also."

Robin Zeilinski says she had had many delays in finishing her education at RACC. She thanks us for all our help. Our pleasure, Robin!

Angela Peffley writes that she is 20 years old, that she quit school in 9th grade, never studied for the GED test, and passed with a 270. ANGELA!! Have your considered HARVARD?!!

Rachel Torres is a very busy lady. She is president of the Spanish Political Association and is also on the committees of El Pueblo Newspaper, the American Cancer Society, and the United Way. Rachel is also a volunteer-in-training for Community Leadership. It's GREAT to see a GED alum become so community-involved.

And to our teachers ...

Vicki Eby gives "hats off" to Pat Kotch. Michael Hunsberger sends a BIG thanks to Linda Mitchell and Patricia Faison expresses her thanks to Deane Cressman.

Thanks for this recognition, alums ... We think our teachers are GREAT -- glad you do, too!

**Everyone likes to read about
what others are doing now.**

14 Looking Back, Looking Ahead

SUMMARY WORDS FROM MELISSA. . .

This has been an exciting year! The formation of the GED Alumni Organization at Reading Area Community College has fulfilled a need we had felt for years. Now, rather than losing contact with classmates and teachers, our GED graduates become active alumni!

Establishing the Alumni Organization was not an easy task. The biggest obstacle was finding practical, effective ways to accommodate alumni's schedules and interests. But we learned--sometimes the hard way--several important concepts:

1. **Lay a solid foundation.** It's easy to get caught up in a wave of enthusiasm and jump right into an activity. But unless you take time to analyze the needs of your target group and carefully plan each step, your enthusiasm may soon turn to frustration. Our Interest Committee structure has been the best way for us to function; it may not be the best for you. The point is to take the time to find out!

2. **"Meeting needs" is the catch-phrase.** For the organization to be successful, it had to meet our alumni's needs (as well as the needs of current students and of the adult-education effort in Pennsylvania). If you want to encourage participation and generate enthusiasm, you must "give the people what they want." Make it fun, too.

3. **Delegate responsibility.** There are plenty of ready, willing, and extremely

able alums out there just waiting for someone to recruit them into action. Have faith in the talents of your alumni; remember it is their organization; and give them major responsibilities in the club's activities. Besides, if responsibility is delegated, no one is overworked, and everyone is happy.

4. **Get started!** With everything in place, schedule your first major activity. Our bet is that you'll be pleased with the response.

Now that we've established our Alumni Organization, it's important to keep the momentum going. A very wise teacher once advised me never to end a class by completing an activity. She said to end by beginning something that the students can work on just long enough to whet their appetites for the next time. The same goes for an organization. Make some solid plans in June for September's activities. And throughout the year, just before a big event, gather a group of alums to begin work on the next big event. Then, as you're basking in the success of one activity, you can speak with enthusiasm about the next one.

We hope to have a very long-lived, active GED alumni organization. We know its success will depend on a team effort of alumni and staff working together toward our missions. We feel fortunate to have begun our GED Alumni Organization with a 310 grant, and we thank the Pennsylvania Department of Education for this. It's been a very good year--with the promise of more to come.

RACC group eases way for GED alumni

By Susan Shelby
Staff Writer

Because a diploma does not carry with it an automatic end to problems and frustrations, a support group is being formed for alumni of the General Education Development program at Reading Area Community College.

The GED program prepares people who never graduated from high school to test for an equivalency degree. If they pass the test, they are awarded a high school equivalency diploma.

Sometimes, however, GED students mistakenly think that their lives will become problem-free when they get their diplomas, said Melissa M. Jamula, coordinator of adult basic education for RACC, and founder of the alumni program.

"Although the GED is a big step, it is not the end of the rainbow," Jamula said. "Some people think that everything will be wonderful once they have their diplomas. When it doesn't always work out the way they think it should, they get frustrated."

44Some people think that everything will be wonderful once they have their diplomas. When it doesn't always work out the way they think it should, they get frustrated.99

— Melissa Jamula

The alumni group, which will meet for the first time Tuesday, April 29, from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Penn-Berks Room at RACC, will try to ease those frustrations by offering advice and guidance.

In addition to supporting GED alumni, the group will offer encouragement to current GED

students, and lobby for more state funds for adult education.

Jamula said Pennsylvania ranks 50 out of the 50 states in support of adult education.

GED alumni are eager to help current students, Jamula said, because they understand how discouraged they can get.

"The GED student's biggest enemy is his attitude," Jamula said.

Many students fear they will not be able to pass the test, or become discouraged if they do not pass it the first time.

The alumni club plans to visit the classrooms of the current students, encouraging them to keep trying and not give up.

Dean Levensgood of Olney, who received an equivalency diploma last year and now is enrolled at RACC as a credit student, understands the problems faced by students in the GED program.

"You really need motivation," said Levensgood, who has been active in the alumni group. "It would have been nice to have somebody walk into the classroom and tell me it wasn't so bad."

In addition to helping GED students through the program, Levensgood, who helped organize the alumni group, said he will encourage members to continue their educations.

"We want people to know that getting the diploma isn't the only thing," Levensgood said. "People make excuses why they can't continue their education, but for every excuse they have not to go to college, RACC usually has an answer to the problem."

The alumni group will tell GED students about available programs such as day care, and help them apply for financial aid if needed.

Levensgood said the group also will help GED students who decide to continue their educations to make the transition into college.

"I wish there would have been somebody to show me around the college and help me feel more at home there," Levensgood said. "That will be an big part of what our group will do."

Adult education is becoming increasingly important, Jamula said, with more and more people wanting to get involved.

More than 500 adults each year test for a high school equivalency diploma, Jamula said, and there

is already a waiting list for the GED program, she said.

Students who enroll in the program this year can look forward to a little extra help from the alumni group.

15 Three Other Alumni Projects

During the 1985-86 school year, three other 310 projects in Pennsylvania also dealt with alumni associations. Because each project was unique, a description of each is included in this book.

PENNSYLVANIA'S GED ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (PA 98-6043)

Sponsoring Organization:

Adult Education Linkage Services
Box 214
Troy, PA 16947
Phone: 717/596-3474

Project Director: David W. Fluke
Federal Funds: \$6,889

Adult Education Linkage Services is a private, nonprofit organization providing support services and technical assistance to adult education programs. The 310 project known as "Pennsylvania's GED Alumni Organization" provided support, technical assistance and materials to both adult educators and adults who have participated in a program of instruction and counseling designed to prepare them for the General Educational Development Test who are interested in forming an alumni association.

Although support, assistance, and materials were designed for use by GED graduates, materials were also distributed to adult educators in Pennsylvania and other states.

The goals of the project were:

1. To provide the technical assistance necessary to establish a local GED alumni chapter in each Section 306-funded program area.
2. To produce five regional workshops for "key" GED alumni as identified by local program staff.
3. To develop and distribute a booklet called Pennsylvania's GED Alumni Organizational Handbook to key alumni throughout Pennsylvania.

According to Project Director Dave Fluke, "The degree of success to which activities of the project have met was gen-

erally high." As of April 1986, the project had provided assistance, through workshops and special requests, to 114 adult educators and alumni in Pennsylvania. Attendance at the regional workshops ranged from a low of 3 to a high of 28. The Handbook was developed and distributed to all 306 programs and more than 100 individuals involved in some way with GED alumni.

CARRYING ON

"It is hoped," reported Fluke, "that the efforts and activities begun by adult educators and GED alumni during this project year will assume the initiative in providing the services needed in other areas wishing to form local GED alumni organizations. It is also hoped that those alumni groups now in existence will form together into a statewide organization."

Looking back on the project, Fluke admitted he was somewhat naive in assuming that adult educators would be interested enough in forming GED alumni groups to devote the time and energy necessary to help them get started. "We have found a peculiar lack of enthusiasm on the part of most adult educators," said Fluke. On the other hand, he went on, "When adult education professionals assume leadership, things begin to happen and eventually alumni carry forward the program more or less on their own."

For Fluke's project, then, the result of this lack of interest and participation was fewer alumni groups being established than originally hoped for. Nevertheless, he said, "We can see the concept of local GED alumni groups is viable, and local groups can be effectively created with at least one individual at the local level who is willing to devote time and energy to organization."

Pennsylvania's GED Alumni Organizational Handbook explains many important tips for forming an association. The 27-page booklet is available, as quantities permit, from AdvancE. For more information, see Chapter 16, Other Resources, page 24.

ESTABLISHMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF A MIFFLIN COUNTY GED ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (PA 98-6032)

Sponsoring Organization:

Tuscarora Intermediate Unit No. 11
R.D. #1, Box 70-A
McVeytown, PA 17051
Phone: 717/248-4942

Project Director: Carol Molek (Alumni Association Coordinator); additional contact: Atha Workinger (Alumna and Center Secretary)

Federal Funds: \$4,500

Tucked away in rural Mifflin County is an extremely successful new alumni group, thanks to the impetus of a small 1985-86 310 grant. The project called for a goal of 75 members during the first year; by early April there were already 171 card-carrying members! Of these, 50 were active (about 10 men and 40 women).

Other goals successfully met were:

1. To establish a meeting center for alumni at the Adult Education T.I.U. Center.
2. To create a supportive environment for alumni.
3. To establish pride and achievement in receiving a GED diploma: by (a) having alumni speak at winter and spring graduation ceremonies and (b) producing two 4-page newsletters (the first became 10 pages, the second 14!).
4. To increase good public relations for adult education by (a) having two news articles published (eight actually appeared) and (b) placing four radio announcements (so far 12).
5. To maintain a current mailing list. This was accomplished with the help of the Mifflin County School District.
6. To help current GED students by providing alumni tutors.
7. To have alumni actively recruit new GED students.

MANY MORE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Monday night is alumni night at the Center. Once a month there is a general meeting. On the other three Mondays, Job Search, Writing, and other workshops meet.

Besides achieving its goals, the Mif-

flin County GED Alumni Association:

- Organized counseling activities.
- Set up a table at Lewistown's award-winning spring event, "Kid Connection," passing out capped-and-gowned styrofoam cups encouraging kids to stay in school.
- Furnished an alumna speaker for a TIU Board meeting.
- Sent representatives to participate in presentations at the Mid-Winter Conference for Adult Education in Hershey in February.
- Organized and sponsored the winter graduation ceremony; more than 100 attended.
- Distributed graduation photos.
- Held a fundraising activity, the raffle of an original oil painting by a member; raised over \$200.
- Had the Literacy Coordinator as a guest speaker at the March meeting.
- Produced an alumni pamphlet.
- Printed/distributed membership cards.
- Designed a logo.
- Sent letters to state senators to support House Bill 2038 (see page 12).

LOOKING AHEAD

The ultimate goal of the 310 project was for the Alumni Association to become autonomous for the next school year. Toward this end, leadership within the group was established, and officers were elected in May.

Future plans include another fundraising project, sponsorship of the next graduation ceremony, local student-of-the-year publicity, a book of adult student writing, a group theater trip, working with the Mifflin County School District's Drop-out Prevention Program, a scrapbook of the Center's history, and an alumni yearbook.

"Our biggest problem," reflected Carol Molek, "was how time consuming this project became, especially initially for organization. However, as responsibility shifted to alumni, the problem lessened." Carol recommends that key people be identified within the group to organize and lead others; otherwise, the group could easily lose momentum and dissolve. Nevertheless, the Mifflin County Alumni Association met with outstanding initial success.

**A GED ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
(PA 98-6016)**

Sponsoring Organization:

The Lutheran Settlement House
Women's Program
1340 Frankford Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19125
Phone: 215/426-8610

Project Director: Carol Goertzel

Additional contact: Carria Hawkins

Federal Funds: \$20,195

The Women's Program provides educational classes for poor and working-class black, white, and Hispanic women, predominantly from the Fishtown/Kensington section of Philadelphia. The target population for this grant was the program's 293 GED graduates from 1980 through 1985. Of these, approximately 85% were women and 15% men; 208 were white, 28 Hispanic, and 21 black. The remaining 38 had not indicated their race on registration forms.

The goals of the project were:

1. To establish a model GED alumni group of the Women's Program.
2. To provide technical assistance to four other alumni associations.
3. To initiate a statewide alumni association network.

The Alumni Association was established with a steering committee of ten students. Semi-monthly meetings were scheduled for the second and fourth Friday evenings of each month. Average attendance was 15-20 people.

FIRST-YEAR ACTIVITIES

As of this writing, the alumni association had carried out the following:

October: First meeting, for planning and strategy. An attempt at outreach to three other programs resulted in no interest.

November: Speaker from Antioch University. After hearing what Antioch had to offer, one association member enrolled.

December: Christmas Clothing and Toy Exchange: received donations from the community and assisted over 100 families. This will become an annual event.

January: Speaker from Temple University on how to finance higher education, find hidden aid, and get into college. As a result, several alumni applied to colleges.

February: A pre-reunion social was canceled due to weather. The second meeting saw the formation of the Alumni Steering Committee. A decision was made to purchase school rings. Carol Goertzel participated in a session on GED alumni associations at the Pennsylvania Midwinter Conference for Adult Continuing Education.

March: Instead of the first meeting, alumni served as hostesses and hosts at the International Women's Day Celebration. Second meeting was canceled due to Good Friday.

April: Alumni newsletter was printed and mailed. The school ring was selected and ordered. Work on the next newsletter began, as did plans for a GED Awards Dinner and Alumni Reunion. In response to a telephone survey to area GED programs to determine interest in starting an alumni association network, staff members said their responsibilities were already extremely heavy and that they would not be able to work on an alumni project until summer. Contacts were made with three other alumni groups in Pennsylvania.

FUTURE PLANS

The Alumni Association plans to distribute membership cards to all Women's Program GED graduates to promote interest and participation in the group.

For the summer, the group is planning fundraising events, a film festival, a career information workshop, fall workshops, and annual Thanksgiving and Christmas events. They would also like to initiate a speakers bureau and a mentor program.

Carol Goertzel, Women's Program Director, made an important suggestion after observing the workings of the alumni program: "Because alumni become busy with school, work, and families after they graduate, it's important to get students involved in planning alumni activities before they graduate. Ideally, there should be a part-time staff person to coordinate communication, meetings, and activities."

16 Other Resources

Interested in developing an ABE/GED alumni association? You'll want to explore all the available resources on the subject.

FROM ADVANCE

AdvancE, the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Resource Center for adult education, is a collection of materials on adult education. Interestingly, other than a few passing mentions of the value of alumni in public relations, the only materials on the subject at this time come out of Pennsylvania. For the resources described below, call Annette McAlister at AdvancE at 1-800-992-2283. Outside of PA, call 717/783-9541. Or write to AdvancE, PDE Resource Center, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333.

Reaching the Least Educated, by Eugene L. Madeira, was produced as a 310 project in 1980. Pages 20-30 describe "The How and Why of an ABE/GED Alumni Association," particularly in recruiting new students and planning graduation events for subsequent GED recipients. The complete book is available on loan.

The How and Why of GED Alumni Associations is a more in-depth presentation which Gene Madeira made to the National Advisory Council on Adult Education. Ask for a photocopy of the paper.

Formation of an Alumni Association is a three-page how-to outline which was part of a 310 project called Project SWAP (Statewide Adult Publicity - Sherry Royce and Kathy Fasano, I.U. 13).

Starting a Local GED Alumni Association is a 19-page guide by Ken Wallick of PDE. Aside from procedures for nonprofit incorporation and registering a fictitious name, this pamphlet has been incorporated into:

Pennsylvania's GED Alumni Organizational Handbook, produced by Adult Education Linkage Services as part of the 310 project described on page 21. This 27-page booklet is the most comprehensive technical guide now available on alumni associations. It includes valuable information on group org-

anizing in general, public relations, portions of Madeira's and Wallick's earlier efforts, and how to organize every aspect of a graduation event. Copies are available as quantities permit; thereafter, on loan.

Operation Alumni: Finding Them, Organizing Them, Making the PAACE Connection (this book) completes the currently available resources list. This 24-page book describes the inner workings of the actual formation of a GED alumni group at Reading Area Community College. It, too, is available as quantities permit and thereafter on a loan basis.

Lastly, copies of the final reports of all four of Pennsylvania's 1985-86 projects on forming alumni associations are available.

CONTACTING SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

An excellent source of information are those associations that already exist. Here is a confirmed list of contacts for groups in Pennsylvania as of mid-1986:

Adult Education Program, Upper Perkiomen H.S., 2 Walt Rd., Pennsburg, PA 18073

Frank S. Gruszka, RD 4, Box 538, Hobbs Rd., Tunkhannock, PA 18657 (Tunkhannock H.S. group)

Sally Kusuplos, 1316 Passey Ln., Lancaster, PA 17603 (Adult Enrichment Ctr. group)

Melissa Jamula, Reading Area Community College, P.O. Box 1706, Reading, PA 19603

Carol Molek, Tuscarora I.U. #11, RD 1, Box 70A, McVeytown, PA 17051

Dr. Robert Murray, Pennypackhouse School, 8001 State St., Philadelphia, PA 19136 (prison alumni)

Carol Goertzel, Kathy Reilly, or Carria Hawkins, Lutheran Settlement House, 1340 Frankford Ave., Phila., PA 19125

Daniel Schneck, 595 School Rd., Nazareth, PA 18064 (Pen Argyl H.S. group)

Shirley Thomas, 301 Washington Blvd., Bangor, PA 18013 (Bangor H.S. group)

Thomas Wertz, Camp Hill S.C.I., P.O. Box 200, Camp Hill, PA 17011